

Sampling Project Planned To Find PCB Source

Ten-Mile Drain Superfund Site

St. Clair Shores, Michigan

March 2011

Come visit us

The EPA continues to keep the community informed and aware of work happening at the Ten-Mile Drain site. Ahead of the sampling activities this spring, the EPA employees will hold two informational sessions at St. Clair Shores Public Library on March 31, 2011. Representatives from the Agency will be available to answer residents' questions one-on-one from 10 a.m. to noon and from 5 to 7 p.m. No formal presentation will be given. The EPA will also continue to keep you informed through additional updates like this one.

Contacts

For more information or if you have questions or want to comment on the Ten-Mile Drain investigation you can contact these team members:

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The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency in collaboration with state, county and local officials is planning an investigation this spring that will look for the source of chronic PCB contamination in the Ten-Mile Drain. The EPA and its contractors will be sampling in the utility corridors (water, gas, sanitary sewers) that intersect the Ten-Mile drain near the Bon Brae and Harper intersection. Sampling will provide the EPA information about where the source may be located, confirm whether PCBs are moving along the utility corridors and help determine how the PCBs are entering the drain system. PCBs are short for polychlorinated biphenyls, a group of synthetic chemical compounds that stay a long time in the environment and potentially cause cancer and other health problems.

Sampling begins the week of April 11 weather permitting and will continue for five weeks. The EPA will not be sampling any residences during this phase of the source investigation. However, you will likely see crews wearing protective gear on the streets and possibly in front of your homes along the street right-of-ways. Crews will be using hand drills to locate the utility lines and then marking them up to a week before the actual sampling begins.

Workers will collect up to 50 soil borings targeting the underground utility corridors. The first soil boring will be installed near the Bon Brae and Harper intersection and other samples will be collected near that intersection along Harper and Bon Brae. Sampling locations may be adjusted or added based on the results provided to the EPA by the on-site mobile laboratory. Having the EPA mobile lab on the scene will provide for a quick turnaround time of less than 24 hours for many results. That will allow the Agency and its contractors to make quick decisions in the field to speed up the identification of the potential PCB source.

Residents may see crews using a hydraulically powered geoprobe to take samples. Residents will have a chance to see photos of the different types of equipment being used and speak with officials at the open house.

The sampling team plans to work Monday through Friday from about 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. During the first week of sampling, the EPA staff will be knocking on doors and giving residents notice and information about the project. The EPA will hold an open-house style meeting to give residents an opportunity to talk about the site (see left-hand box P. 1).

Removal activities and maintenance

Monitoring data collected behind the "weirs" or small dams demonstrates PCB oil and contaminated sediment (mud) continues to infiltrate into the Ten-Mile Drain storm sewer system. In February, the EPA removed PCB oil from the drain. Six of the 17 weirs were cleaned with snares, absorbent material resembling pompoms that were lowered into the drain. One



The geoprobe or soil probing equipment will be used to collect a continuous 2-inch-wide soil core sample from the surface to the bottom of the utility corridor.

55-gallon drum was used to collect the snares and PCB oil, which was taken to a licensed PCB-disposal facility. In addition, snares were attached to weighted chains and left in front of these six weirs, allowing incoming oil to collect on them and support future sample collection and maintenance by the EPA.

Currently, the EPA is working on a plan to periodically remove and properly dispose of the PCB oil and affected sediment that has accumulated behind the weirs, install absorbent material to further inhibit the movement of the contamination, and continue to monitor the level of contamination caught in the weirs. This short-term approach will manage the current pollution within the Ten-Mile Drain while the EPA continues through the remedial process and a final long-term cleanup plan is selected. The EPA will bring a proposed cleanup plan to the public later this year and let people comment on it.

About the Ten-Mile Drain site

In September 2010, the Ten-Mile Drain site was placed on the National Priorities List. The NPL is a roster of the nation's hazardous waste sites eligible for investigation and cleanup under the EPA's Superfund program.

The site is located near the intersection of Bon Brae Street and Harper Avenue in St. Clair Shores, Macomb County, Michigan. It includes a portion of the Ten-Mile drain storm sewer system, which consists of the concrete sewer pipes and soil surrounding the pipes in an underground storm utility corridor. PCB pollution has moved and contaminated the sediment in and around the drain, and is present in two local canals where the drain system discharges.

Frequently asked health questions

Why are the workers wearing protective gear?

Am I at risk?

It is unlikely that you would be at risk from the same type of possible exposure as workers. You may notice crews using special gear such as body suits, gloves, and breathing masks while taking samples during this latest investigation. Workers whose job requires them to work in close contact with possible contaminants are required to wear personal protective equipment. Everyone's protection is very important to the EPA. Each cleanup site has to have a specific health and safety plan to protect the safety of both workers and residents.

Will I be exposed to PCBs during the EPA's sampling event?

The workers will be taking subsurface samples in the underground utility corridors. The depth of these samples will be about 8 to 15 feet below the surface so it is very unlikely residents or passersby will be exposed. Workers will take a 2-inch diameter core of soil, leaving behind a small hole. The workers will then refill the hole with clean soil. As another safety precaution, waste soil that is not put into a sample container or used to refill the hole will be removed from the sampling site.

Want updates?

EPA continually updates the mailing list to get information out to residents. If you are not on the mailing list and want to be, contact the EPA Community Involvement Coordinator Megan McSeveney (see front-page box). Interested people can also learn about the situation by reading official documents that can be reviewed at the repositories listed on the back page or visit the website www.epa.gov/region5/sites/tenmiledrain.

Form a CAG?

Another option available to people seeking more information about the Ten-Mile Drain site would be to form a Community Advisory Group. A CAG provides a setting in which community members can get up-to-date information about the status of cleanup activities as well as discuss their views and concerns about the cleanup progress with the EPA, state regulatory agencies and other officials. A CAG is also a public forum in which all affected and interested parties can have a voice and actively participate in the process. If a group of residents is interested in forming a CAG, contact the EPA's Megan McSeveney for more information. You can also visit the EPA's CAG website at www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/cag/index.htm.

About PCBs

PCBs or polychlorinated biphenyls are a group of chemicals originally used in industrial processes and products such as coolants and lubricants.

In 1977 PCB production was banned in the United States, but PCB mixtures remain in old electrical equipment and other items. There is also substantial PCB contamination of landfills and rivers.

PCBs can pose potential health risks through eating contaminated food, soil or water, through direct contact, or through breathing PCB-contaminated air or particles. The EPA considers PCBs as possible cancer-causing chemicals.



EPA will bring its mobile laboratory to the Ten-Mile Drain sampling project. The lab is fully equipped and will provide quick results on soil samples, sometimes in less than 24 hours.

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